

LYNCHBURG CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Item Summary

MEETING DATE: **May 10, 2005**

AGENDA ITEM NO.: 11

CONSENT:

REGULAR: **X**

CLOSED SESSION:

(Confidential)

ACTION: **X**

INFORMATION:

ITEM TITLE: **Resolution in Support of Continued Funding of AMTRAK**

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the attached resolution in support of continued federal funding of AMTRAK and forward it to the City's congressional delegation.

SUMMARY: The attached letter from Virginians for High Speed Rail asks that the City adopt a resolution in support of continued federal funding for AMTRAK. As you know, Kemper Street Station serves as a stop for AMTRAK trains going north and south. Furthermore, the City has been designated as a future hub for the TransDominion Express (TDX) which will carry passenger traffic from Bristol to Richmond and Washington, D.C. The elimination of federal support for AMTRAK would stop rail passenger service through Lynchburg.

PRIOR ACTION(S): None

FISCAL IMPACT: N/A

CONTACT(S): Kimball Payne

ATTACHMENT(S): Letter from Virginians for High Speed Rail; Resolution

REVIEWED BY: lkp

RESOLUTION:

WHEREAS The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (AMTRAK) provides valuable passenger rail service to the nation, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and to the City of Lynchburg, and

WHEREAS the further development of an effective intercity rail network for the movement of both people and goods would help to relieve other stressed modes of transportation, and

WHEREAS past governors and the General Assembly of Virginia have consistently shown support for passenger rail service in the Commonwealth, and

WHEREAS AMTRAK enjoys certain franchise and contractual rights to use the rail system that would be fundamental to the further development of intercity rail service, including High Speed Rail initiatives and the TransDominion Express (TDX), and

WHEREAS the currently proposed Federal Budget of the Bush Administration proposes to end funding for AMTRAK,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Lynchburg City Council does hereby call on its Senators and Representatives in Congress to support continued federal funding of AMTRAK and efforts to promote and enhance rail transportation in the Commonwealth and the nation.

Adopted:

Certified:

Clerk of Council

065L

Virginians For High Speed Rail



April 19, 2005

Mr. L. Kimball Payne, III
City Manager
900 Church Street
Lynchburg, VA 24505

Dear Mr. Payne:

As I am sure you are aware, the currently proposed Administration budget calls for an end to funding of Amtrak, and termination of federal commitment to a national passenger rail system. Virginians for High Speed Rail is holding its annual membership meeting in Washington, DC on May 17, specifically to impress on Virginia's Congressional Delegation that killing Amtrak will have a dire effect on the Commonwealth's transportation network and its economy.

We need your help.

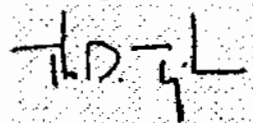
We are asking for support at the May 17 meeting from local governments, chambers of commerce, economic development authorities, business coalitions and other supporters of Virginians for High Speed Rail. We ask that you:

- Have your governing body sign a petition or resolution supporting the continued funding of a federal passenger rail infrastructure. Enclosed is a sample petition for your consideration.
- Attend our annual meeting on May 17 and present your position to Virginia's Congressional Delegation. If you or one of your leadership is unable to attend, we can have one of our Board Members from your area handle the presentation.
- Continue to support Virginians for High Speed Rail and let us know how we can help educate and advocate improved inter-city rail in your area.

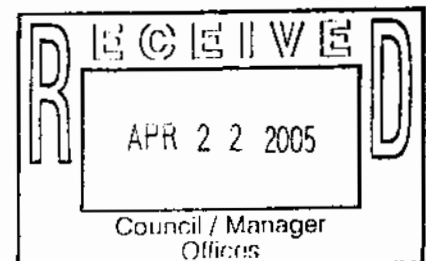
We know that the time is short, and it is difficult to take action on an issue such as this during one or two council/board meeting cycles. But we fear that time is also short for Amtrak, and we need to let congress know how important its survival is to Virginia. Virginians for High Speed Rail has had some great success recently, helping to secure annual funding from the General Assembly for rail projects and helping to set up a Virginia Rail Advisory Board. But our efforts at the state level will be lost without a federal program in place.

Thanks in advance for your help, and for your continued commitment to improved passenger rail in the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Thomas G. Tingle, President
Virginians for High Speed Rail



Richmond Friends of RAIL

April 13, 2005

P E T I T I O N to Virginia Delegation

U. S. Senators

Hon. John W. Warner

Hon. George Allen

U. S. Representatives

Hon. Richard Boucher

Hon. Eric Cantor

Hon. Jo Ann Davis

Hon. Tom Davis

Hon. Thelma Drake

Hon. Jim Moran, Jr.

Hon. Bobby Scott

Hon. Frank Wolf

Hon. J. Randy Forbes

Hon. Virgil H. Goode, Jr.

Hon. Robert W. Goodlatte

Re: R A I L

Responding to the appeals of Virginia citizens, Governor Mark Warner, and his predecessor Governor Jim Gilmore, with overwhelming support from the Virginia General Assembly during the 2005 and 2000 Sessions, respectively, have clearly and decisively placed the Commonwealth of Virginia in a leadership position, with meaningful funding support, in pursuit of a more fully-developed intercity rail network for the movement of both people and goods.

Virginia and other states, notably neighboring North Carolina, recognize that a national rail network is essential to the ultimate success of rail development to augment and relieve other modes of transportation currently under stress. No single state can do it alone.

Virginia lacks a Federal partner, without which the intercity rail development hopes and aspirations of the Commonwealth cannot be achieved.

The current Amtrak restructuring initiative of the Bush Administration, as articulated by U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta, represents both an opportunity as well as a serious risk to the interests and long-term objectives of the Commonwealth of Virginia, its business and commercial interests, and our citizens.

The risk is that much of what we have in place today might be lost in an overly-simplistic approach to the "purging" of Amtrak. The National Railroad Passenger Corp. (Amtrak) represents but a very thin veneer concealing much deeper and more fundamental problems that adversely affect the viability and handling capacity of the U.S. rail network – both freight and passenger.

The deteriorating rail situation in the U.S. has spiraled downward for more than fifty years. It would be unrealistic to expect to correct it overnight. It cannot be fixed without MORE, rather than less, public funding at the Federal level.

We seek your leadership in formulating a multi-year, phased solution; a solution that is transformative rather than one that is precipitous and punitive. We urge you to protect the passenger rail infrastructure and services that we now have in place in Virginia, and to complement such transitional efforts with a well-conceived Federal program that, like Federal support for highways, ports and aviation, enhances and promotes rail transportation in partnership with the Commonwealth of Virginia and its privately-owned railroads.

Richmond Friends of RAIL:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sharon R. Mitschey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end.

Chairman

April 13, 2005



You Are Invited to Attend
Virginians for High Speed Rail
Annual Meeting in Washington DC
May 17, 2005
B369 Rayburn Building, Capitol Hill
Independence Ave. and S. Capitol St.,SW

4 p.m. Welcome, Thomas G. Tingle, VHSR President
VHSR Meeting

5 p.m. Virginia Congressional Delegation
(Invited)

Secretary of Transportation
Pierce Homer (Invited)

6 p.m. Reception

Registration form below. Send with check for \$30 by May 13.
Make check to:

VHSR, 5101 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230
For information call: 804-864-5193

Registration

Name _____ Organization _____

Telephone _____ FAX _____ Email _____

VHSR Annual Meeting Set for DC; May 17 Reception on Capitol Hill

Virginians for High Speed Rail will hold its annual meeting May 17th at the Rayburn Building on Capitol Hill, Washington DC.

A Washington gathering to meet with and visit the Virginia Congressional delegation has been on the VHSR agenda for some time. The meeting will be at 4 p.m. and will be followed with a reception (cost \$30).

With rail events in Washington becoming more critical, the executive committee voted to change the usual May luncheon to a reception in Washington to take rail concerns to members of the House of Representatives and Senate.

Virginia's Washington representatives and senators have been invited to the meeting. Speakers will address Amtrak and other rail issues.

Other Virginia rail organizations have been invited to join VHSR for the meeting. Congressman Eric Cantor's office made arrangements for the meeting. Rep. Cantor (R-Richmond) represents the 7th Congressional district.

Attendance at this event is open to any who would like to attend. For information, call the VHSR Richmond office at 804-864-5193.

A special Virginia High Speed Rail hotel rate has been arranged at The Georgetown Inn, 1310 Wisconsin Ave. N. W. Reservations must be booked by May 1. For reservations call 202-333-8900 and request the VHSR rate.

On The **Fast Track** Virginians for High Speed Rail

SPRING 2005

A Rail Fund!! First Ever!

Rail in Virginia, for the first time ever, will have dedicated funds in the state as a result of action by the Governor and the 2005 General Assembly.

A rail fund of \$23.2 million was established and funded by the General Assembly.

The Governor proposed the fund in December. House Republicans also introduced a rail proposal in early January that provided a rail fund of \$33.2 million.

The Virginia Rail Plan, written by Virginians for High Speed Rail in 2001, called for public funding for rail. Likewise, the Virginia State Rail Plan prepared by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation last year and the Governor's Commission on Rail Enhancement for the 21st Century both called for the investment of public funds in Virginia's private rail system. *(Continued on page 5)*

Whither Amtrak . . . Again

Is it crying wolf? Or, this time, is it real? Experts say the President's proposal to eliminate funding for Amtrak is the most serious of the annual Amtrak threats. Amtrak ridership is up. Highway congestion is worse. Airlines are struggling and the end of Amtrak is proposed.

An aide to Virginia Sen. John Warner says, "Congress isn't going to let Amtrak die."

But, so far, votes and comments are not reassuring. Sen. Robert C. Byrd's (D-WV) attempt to add an Amtrak budget amendment of \$1.04 billion failed, but won 46 votes.

Gov. Mark Warner told the National Governors Association and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) in March that the development of a "viable national passenger rail network is a government component of a truly multi-modal transportation system. The federal government must assume a greater responsibility for achieving this national priority."

The Virginia Congressional delegation, meeting with Governor

Warner in March, heard him express his concern with the Bush Administration's "drastic reductions in funding for Amtrak."

Governor Warner responded to VHSR's request for Amtrak help, saying "Improvements can be made to the existing model for federal passenger rail support; however, federal support should not be phased out or eliminated in the guise of reform. Sustained federal funding for passenger rail service is a precondition for the development of a national transportation network to meet the needs of the 21st century."

Maintaining and improving inter-city rail service is an ongoing Virginians for High Speed Rail objective. Richard L. Beadles of Richmond, a rail advocate, former president of the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad and now executive director of the Virginia Rail Policy Institute, is the author of an Amtrak Q&A that may be found on the VHSR website at www.vhsr.com. Selected Q&As are included as an insert (pages 3 and 4) in this issue of *Fast Track*.



President's Column

Return on Investment

by Thomas G. Tingle,
VHSR President

Would you consider a gain of \$150 for every investment dollar to be a good return? Or, to put it in terms of non-profit contributions, each dollar leveraged resulting in \$150 toward the cause? Well, that's the "performance" this past year of your investment in Virginians for High Speed Rail.

Over the past five years, Virginians for High Speed Rail has grown from a fledgling, all-volunteer group to a major player in the advocacy for passenger rail in Virginia, with our annual budget of only \$150,000. This past General Assembly, we helped spearhead the first dedicated annual revenue stream for rail improvements in Virginia, starting at \$23 million this coming year. That's a pretty good return for a non-profit that is funded by private businesses and local governments.

Can Virginians for High Speed Rail take all the credit for this success? Absolutely not. Governor Mark Warner has shown leadership and a commitment to rail as part of a comprehensive transportation policy. And his outgoing Secretary of Transportation, Whit Clement, along with Karen Rae at the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, have continued to support rail solutions for Virginia. House Speaker William Howell's transportation package included \$33 million in rail funding. The House bill, sponsored by Delegate Joe May, seconded the Governor's rail funding, and passed the state's first rail investment effort with a compromise of \$23 million.

But without Virginians for High Speed Rail, your voice in education and advocacy for improved rail for the Commonwealth, the foundation for this successful campaign would not have been laid. We have much more to do, and we need your help. We're happy to see the \$23 million annually, but there is much more that is needed to bring more frequent, efficient and reliable passenger rail to the state.

We are moving in the right direction. Invest in our efforts, and let us show you how we can leverage your investment for rail in Virginia.

VRE's Success Relies on Service; Reliability Keeps Customers

When Jim Browder and his wife left Alexandria at 1:24 p.m. for a trip to Hinton, West Virginia, via Amtrak's Cardinal, they were not prepared for what became a 13 hour trip. They arrived at 2:15 a.m. the next morning.

Many stops and, finally, being left in the dark on a siding near Clifton Forge, minus an engine—no light and no air plagued the trip. "The worst part was that the employees didn't give a rip. We'd ask them questions about what was going on and they never even answered," Browder, who is director of sales and marketing for The Georgetown Inn, said. A complaint letter to Amtrak was never answered.

That was last November and Browder hasn't taken a train trip since even though he has always been an enthusiastic train traveler.

Browder's account confirms exactly what Dale Zehner told Virginia High Speed Rail board members and guests at the March board meeting.

CEO of the Virginia Railway Express, Zehner was invited to speak

about the phenomenal success of the VRE, the Northern Virginia commuter rail system.

Two prime reasons for the commuter rail success, Zehner said, are: service and keeping customers informed.

"We use Amtrak conductors and engineers but we told them their standards are not high enough," Zehner said. So, VRE re-trained the Amtrak workers to meet their standards.

How you treat your customers is critical in keeping your riders, Zehner said, "If you lose a passenger for any reason, they're not coming back."

"Amtrak does not do well at working with their customers."

When customers want to know why the train stopped, "We tell them," he said.

VRE has also discovered that riders aren't into luxury. "It doesn't matter what they ride on," Zehner said. VRE's cars are mostly old cars purchased from other companies. What is important to their riders is being on time. "Our trains now are more reliable than cars."

Fear of becoming unreliable has VRE working closely with Norfolk Southern and CSX to prevent delays and break-downs. "Our relationships with our two railroads and Amtrak are critical to our success."

Zehner called the Rail Fund established by the 2005 General Assembly "the biggest thing that has happened in a long time."

"I think as time goes on, we will say that that is the smartest thing we ever did."

VRE has more than doubled its usage in its 15 years. Now more than 15,000 commuters ride the trains daily—growth of 102 percent from the 7,000 in the first years.

"Demand is outstripping seats and parking. In Fredericksburg, we're turning people away because they can't park," Zehner said.

To meet the demand for growth, he said money is going to have to go into the railroads. "It's the only way it can grow. Funding challenges will continue and freight will continue to grow. Rail capacity is limited. We need longer trains—not necessarily faster but more reliable."

Instead of cheap fares, we talk value to get you where you want to go, Zehner said. VRE also did well in the General Assembly with \$20 million funding to buy rail cars.

Of Zehner, Bill Greenup, past president of VHSR and a member of Zehner's board, said, "Dale is customer oriented. Service is his focal point."



Janie Burton and Alison Baird, aides to Sen. Mary Margaret Whipple and Sen. John Edwards, toured VRE's double-decker car at a General Assembly reception at Richmond's Main Street Station. Double-deckers are used to accommodate mushrooming use of VRE.

Q. Virginians for High Speed Rail (VHSR) envisions a system of higher-speed passenger rail transportation with modern equipment, frequent and dependable service. Why is VHSR so concerned about preserving Amtrak, which would appear to be anything but what VHSR advocates? A. Amtrak, as we know it today, is certainly not the model for the future, but it is the foundation for the future of a national rail passenger system. Amtrak has a unique, and favorable, "franchise" which is not transferable to other private operators. If the Amtrak franchise, and contractual rights vs. the freight railroads, is lost in restructuring, it is highly unlikely that it could ever be replicated. Therefore, the issue is not preserving Amtrak; it's a matter of not throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Q. Is the issue one of short-haul corridors vs a national system? A. It appears that the Bush Administration rejects the concept of having a national rail passenger system. Amtrak was created in 1971 to operate a national system, not just urban rail corridor service. Thus, Amtrak serves as the current "proxy" for a national rail passenger system.

Q. Why does this vast country need a national rail passenger system? A. Why did the country need an interstate highway system, or a national air traffic control system, or an extensive internal waterway system? All were needed because transportation is systematic in nature. The same is true of rail, including rail passenger service. Unconnected segments do not function very efficiently.

Q. Is rail passenger service relevant today? A. Rail critics are often those who have the luxury of never having to deal with congested urban highways and truck corridors such as I-81 and I-95, nor the hassle of short-haul commercial aviation. However, a large and growing segment of the population wants a rail passenger alternative, and experience has shown that they will use it if offered.

Q. About the long-distance trains, which Secretary Mineta and others describe as "trains to nowhere that nobody rides:" does anybody actually ride from New York to Florida, or from Chicago to L.A.? A. Yes many people do. But Minetta entirely misses the point of the important intermediate, on-and-off, travel volume handled by these trains. People ride the Florida trains, in large numbers, from New York to Richmond, from Richmond to Charleston and Savannah.

Q. With deregulation of aviation, air travel options have increased and fares are generally lower. Why has Amtrak not been able to do likewise subsequent to rail deregulation? A. The Federal government supports and promotes aviation in many ways but leaves responsibility for rail infrastructure to privately-owned freight railroads. It is relatively easy for new airlines to start business. It is very difficult to enter the rail business. Deregulation for freight rails resulted in dramatic shrinkage.

Q. Is Amtrak incapable of reforming itself? Must it be abolished in order to reform and improve rail passenger service? A. The answer depends upon what one means by "reform." It appears that the Bush Administration's concept of reform is to kill Amtrak. It is unrealistic to expect the management of Amtrak to commit suicide. Therefore, will reform, however defined, come from within? Not likely.

Q. Is Amtrak a partisan issue; are there no Republicans who support Amtrak and/or a national rail passenger system? A. Amtrak is not a partisan issue. Many Republicans have been staunch supporters of Amtrak. Democratic administrations, including the Clinton administration, have not been particularly strong in their support for Amtrak. Former Vice President Al Gore used to talk about how the importance high speed rail, but he and his boss, Bill Clinton, never offered up any grand proposals, nor even very much money.

Q. Is Amtrak a significant player in the provision of intercity transportation in Virginia? A. It certainly is. Amtrak operates 22 intercity passenger trains daily in Virginia, depending upon the day of the week. In addition, Amtrak provides operating crews and maintenance/service for 30 Virginia Railway Express commuter rail trains each work day, Monday-Friday. About 14 (approximately 64%) of the Amtrak intercity trains also handle VRE passengers. In recent years, Amtrak has entrained and detrained almost one million intercity passengers annually at Virginia stations. We estimate that an equal, or possibly greater, number travel through Virginia. VRE currently handles more than 3.5 million passengers annually (with support from Amtrak). Thus, it seems fair to say that more than FIVE million Virginia rail passenger trips annually are, in one way or another, dependent upon Amtrak for service. Also, and in addition, Amtrak points out that a very large percentage of the passengers boarding Northeast Corridor trains at Washington's Union Station are from Northern Virginia.

Q. What has the State of Virginia done to assist and promote improved Amtrak service in the Commonwealth? A. Very little, up until now. Most of our service in fact, all of it, was gratuitously provided by Amtrak without any funding assistance from the Commonwealth. Thus, we have been getting the "free ride" that the White House so objects to.

Q. Back in the fall of 1999, then-VA Governor Jim Gilmore and then-President of Amtrak George Warronton issued a press release announcing a joint venture between the Commonwealth and Amtrak to improve rail service in the DC-Richmond rail corridor. This was followed by the appropriation of \$65+ million in the 2000 Session of the General Assembly for improvements in this same strategic corridor. Wasn't this Virginia money, and what happened? A. Yes, but not much! Hardly any of the money has been spent to date because of differences between DRPT and CSX. However, it appears that the money is going to be spent in the near future. This was a great first step by Virginia. The projects are good ones. However, in dealing with CSX, DRPT traded away the quid pro quo benefits in favor of additional VRE service rather than Amtrak service. There was certainly some logic in this, both from the perspective of DRPT and CSX; however, the fact remains that Amtrak and down-state destinations, such as Richmond, stand to get no direct benefits. Sure, Amtrak trains may run a little closer to schedule, but Richmond is not likely to enjoy additional train service, as will, for example, Fredericksburg.

Q. What might it cost if the State of Virginia were to assume responsibility for existing Amtrak service in Virginia — in a manner similar to what the State of North Carolina does for two pairs of trains? A. We don't know, but \$10 million per annum would probably be a good starting point for semi-informed speculation. And this does not begin to address the matter of rolling stock upgrade and replacement.

Q. What is the relationship between VA Railway Express and Amtrak? A. VRE is highly dependent upon Amtrak for maintenance and servicing of equipment, and for operating crews. The operating crews currently provided by Amtrak could come from other rail operating companies, including CSX and NS, if they were willing; however, the servicing and maintenance requirement would be much tougher to accommodate. Amtrak owns and operates Washington Terminal, a large passenger rail terminal facility which is already quite stressed by demands of Maryland commuter rail operations, as well as those of VRE, all in addition to Amtrak's own terminal requirements. While it is certainly possible for the U. S. D.O.T. to assign Washington Terminal to some other entity after a contrived Amtrak bankruptcy, the end result might well be less satisfactory service at higher costs.

Q. Could VRE operate without Amtrak? A. In time, it undoubtedly could, but any sudden bankruptcy of Amtrak could have a very serious and most unsatisfactory impact upon VRE service.

Q. Is there an important distinction to be made when comparing "intercity passenger rail" with "commuter rail transit"? A. It makes all the difference in the world, insofar as the availability of funding is concerned. VRE is the beneficiary of both federal as well as state, and regional, "transit" funding mechanisms. If one is traveling from DC to Fredericksburg, on an Amtrak train handling VRE passengers, as a VRE passenger, it costs much less than if you are an Amtrak passenger, because of the availability of transit funding assistance. If you are traveling to Richmond, you are out of luck!

Q. Is it not fair to require the states to help fund the national system? A. It would be fair, in principle, subject to working out an equitable, comprehensive, formula for both the national system as well as the shorter-haul urban corridors, to include all the players and beneficiaries.

Q. But don't the urban rail corridor services make money—the Northeast Corridor for example? A. No! This is the most puzzling aspect of the White House anti-Amtrak campaign. The Northeast Corridor ("NEC"), is truly a success story in terms of meeting public need and capturing market share, yet it is still a money-loser because it is the most complex and difficult-to-maintain piece of passenger railroad in America. From the rails up, the Northeast Corridor comes close to breaking even. On operations, it competes very successfully with highly-subsidized commercial air service, but it does not earn enough to justify the purchase of new train sets and locomotives, much less cover the huge investment required to maintain and modernize track and signal infrastructure. How Amtrak got the Northeast Corridor is a story in itself, dating back to Penn Central and Conrail days. Nobody else wanted it, so the U.S. D.O.T. gave it to Amtrak, the party least able to maintain and improve it!

Q. There are those who say that freight trains and passenger trains are inherently incompatible and should not be operated on the same tracks. What is your response? A. Anything more than one train on the same track at one time poses potential conflicts, whether freight or passenger, but this is fundamental to railroading and has been successfully overcome—in most cases—for about 170 years!

Q. If Virginia wants to develop an intercity rail passenger system, what ought to be our priorities? A. A fair and equitable outcome in the great Amtrak debate. Then we must concentrate most of our energy and resources on making something work, and work so well as to become both the model and justification for further investment and development. The Washington/Richmond corridor stands the best chance of producing a commercial, market-competitive success. If Richmond-DC works, then that will enable the Commonwealth to proceed to develop Richmond-Hampton Roads, and Richmond-Raleigh-Durham links.

Q. Which of the Amtrak trains serving Virginia would be most vulnerable were cuts in service to be required? A. Hard to say, but just as a guess we would think that the Cardinal, the three-day-per-week Amtrak train serving Charlottesville, Staunton and Clifton Forge, on its run between New York and Chicago, would be in jeopardy.

Q. How does an airport such as the Shenandoah Valley facility, between Staunton and Harrisonburg, rate regularly-scheduled commercial flights, whereas Staunton is only served by one train in each direction three days per week? A. Because there is a Federal subsidy program for "essential air service," which enables that particular airport to maintain its commercial air service.

Q. What's the difference between subsidizing Amtrak service to smaller cities vs. the air subsidy program cited in the previous response? A. One is "in favor" and one is "out!"

Q. Might the freight railroads get back in the passenger business some day? A. No, not "in the business" of attempting to make a profit and run the risk of loss. They might well contract for the operation of trains and for the provision of services, on essentially a no-risk basis. In fact, Norfolk Southern is cautiously exploring this possibility.

Q. Finally, can you put Federal Rail funding in perspective vs. other modes? A. In the current (FY 05) fiscal year, it was: Highway (\$34.35 Billion), Aviation (\$13.858 Billion), Transit (\$7.646 Billion) and Rail (\$1.425 Billion, of which \$1.207 Billion was Amtrak) (Federal transportation funding information from National Association of Railroad Passengers, February 2005 Newsletter.)

For additional Amtrak questions and answers by Dick Beadles go to: www.vhrs.com. Dick Beadles is a rail advocate, and member of several rail advocacy organizations; however the answers to the foregoing questions represent Beadles' personal views, and should not be attributed to anyone else.

A Rail Fund!! First Ever!

(Continued from page 1)

Then-Secretary of Transportation Whitt Clement said of the rail legislation, "It is a great victory for Governor Warner, for those who have been strong rail advocates, for those who have preached a more multimodal approach in developing our transportation infrastructure and for all Virginians."

Rail Advisory Board Created

Both the Governor and the House Republicans, headed by Speaker William J. Howell (R-Stafford), proposed, as well, the creation of a Rail Advisory Board. The General Assembly established a nine-member board that will recommend to the Commonwealth Transportation Board how the rail fund will be spent. The "Rail Enhancement Fund" requires a 30 percent match.

As described in the legislation, the fund can be used to improve railways or rail equipment, rolling stock, rights of way or facilities. When the Governor introduced his bill in December, he gave examples of potential rail fund projects—the Petersburg intermodal facility, I-81 intermodal projects, Virginia Port Authority and Maersk rail access, the TransDominion Express and higher speed rail.

A Rail Advisory Commission was a recommendation of the Governor's Commission that completed its work last November. Board members are to be appointed by the Governor. One of the appointees is to be an at-large member of the Commonwealth Transportation Board. The board members will elect their chairman. Staff for the board will be the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (VDRPT.)

VDRPT operates as an agency of the Virginia Department of Transportation under the Commonwealth Transportation Board. VDRPT became a separate entity in 1992. However, since its separation with its own director from VDOT, DRPT has never had a board.

Director of VDRPT Karen Rae and her staff provided support for the Governor's Rail Commission. "We have reached this historic point, the first ever rail fund in the Commonwealth, thanks to the support of Governor Warner, Transportation Secretary Clement and bi-partisan support from the General Assembly members," Rae said. She credited the "passionate supporters" from CSX, Norfolk Southern, Virginians for High Speed Rail, the Rail Commission and her staff for the milestone rail legislation.

"We have long believed that a rail board will provide advocacy and oversight that will make quite a difference in the advancement of rail and the support that it receives," said Thomas G. Tingle, president of Virginians for High Speed Rail.

Rail Fund to Come From Car Rental Tax

Funds for the Rail Enhancement Fund will come from state taxes paid on car rentals. The Rail Fund was one of the few continuing funds to come out of the General Assembly transportation package of \$848 million.

Rob Shinn, who represents CSX, said the Rail Fund "is an extremely positive step forward and one that will clearly lead to new rail investment in Virginia."

Norfolk Southern's Bruce Wingo described the Rail Fund and

Advisory Board as an "outstanding development in the Commonwealth. It is so refreshing to have the administration and the House leadership propose such a program."

Del. Joe May (R-Leesburg), patron of HB2596 that started as the rail fund bill but with changes ended up containing the entire rail package, strongly supported the legislation and guided it through the legislative process.

"This is a first step—a systematic approach toward addressing our rail needs in the Commonwealth—a good first step," May said.

As chairman of the Transportation Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, May was designated by House Speaker William J. Howell to carry the rail legislation. "He knew of my interest and background in rail," said May, who has worked and published on rail engineering projects.

Ongoing Funding Was a Criteria

"We were looking for an ongoing source of funds—this was the real criteria," he said of the rental car tax devoted to rail. May said the success of the rail legislation "is evidence that the legislature is giving rail the look that it deserves."

When highway lobbyists questioned devoting precious transportation dollars to rail, May said he told them the difference between rail and highway construction isn't that great. "You need to figure out how to make the conversion," May said he advised those representing construction companies.

Response has been positive to the rail legislation, May said. He credited Sen. John Edwards (D-Roanoke) for kicking off the rail fund effort. Edwards has worked to establish a Virginia Rail Development Authority.

May, like Secretary Clement, both look to what lies ahead with the fund and the Advisory Board. May said it will be important for the board members to be knowledgeable and supportive of rail. Secretary Clement said, "We must now shift our focus in the coming months to create a mechanism, through the new Rail Advisory Board, that will enable us to most effectively leverage these taxpayer funds with the private sector."

Secretary Clement said he is very pleased that the rail fund recommendation of the Governor's Rail Commission "has been embraced by the General Assembly with such broad bipartisan support. It's a wonderful accomplishment."

He said he looks forward to "many collaborative projects with the railroad industry in the future."



Delegate Joe May



Mitch Warren (left), Senior Director of National State Relations for Amtrak, told VHSR's board in December that Virginia is critical for rail—with Sen. George Allen as a member of the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, and Sen. John Warner, influential in Reauthorization legislation.

Virginians For High Speed Rail



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Transportation Studies Will Proceed Despite Failure to Agree On Scope and Deadline

Nearly a dozen transportation studies were proposed by legislators in the 2005 session. Not one made it out of the General Assembly.

Sen. Charles Hawkins (R-Chatham), chairman of the Transportation Subcommittee of the Senate Finance Committee, and Del. Leo Wardrup (R-Virginia Beach), chairman of the House Transportation Committee, each submitted legislation for comprehensive studies. In the House of Delegates, six studies were rolled into the Wardrup resolution.

One of those studies, patroned by Del. Harry Parrish (R-Manassas) was a study examining abandoned railroad tracks and their potential use for parks. Converting abandoned railroad track rights-of-way to bike and hiking paths has grown in popularity in Virginia and has been seen in some rural, economically stressed areas as a means of attracting tourists.

Sen. Hawkins spoke often in the Assembly of the need to examine transportation from an intermodal perspective, especially on growing freight traffic resulting from the successful Port of Virginia.

The House Rules Committee voted to incorporate the Hawkins study in the Wardrup study. However, a conference committee was not able to come to agreement on the study resolution.

Consequently, each House will conduct its own study. In internal studies, however, study members can only be members of the General Assembly. The Hawkins study had included experts representing various areas of transportation.

The Senate study will be done with the Senate Transportation Committee before the 2006 session. Neal Menkes, transportation analyst for the Senate Finance Committee, will lead the study.

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